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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 000208

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAL](#) [FR](#)

SUBJECT: NEGATIVE FRENCH RESPONSE TO U.S. PROPOSALS ON  
UNIFIL RENEWAL

REF: A. STATE 4247

[1](#)B. BEIRUT 65

Classified By: Acting Political Counselor Paul Mailhot, reasons 1.4 (b)  
and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary and comment: Senior MFA officials, stressing that they had consulted with the Elysee, rejected the U.S.-proposed inclusion of a preambular reference to UNSCR 1559 in the draft renewal resolution for UNIFIL (ref a), which they described as counterproductive to our shared goal of pressing for Syrian and Lebanese compliance with 1559 and potentially undermining the parties' confidence in UNIFIL. The French appear convinced that even a minimal preambular reference to 1559 will effectively break the line of separation which France had sought to maintain between UNSCR 1559 and the peace process, which will in turn serve Syrian claims that it will not withdraw from Lebanon until a comprehensive peace has been achieved. French officials stressed their desire to work with us in New York to find a compromise on the UNIFIL renewal text. They affirmed readiness to add tougher language on Lebanese sovereignty and independence and the need for Lebanon to extend its authority in the South, as well as more frequent reporting requirements. French officials were less negative, but still cautious, on asking DPKO to examine UNIFIL's force structure, stressing opposition to reducing UNIFIL at a time when they believe we should be asking it to do more. The French also suggested that including the 1559 reference in the UNIFIL renewal could complicate the task before new UN Special Envoy Terje Roed-Larsen, before his first visit to the region in his new capacity. Syria reportedly asked Larsen to delay a planned early January visit for two weeks, during which the SARG suggested there might be unspecified "positive developments" on Lebanon. French officials summed up by stressing their desire to proceed cautiously on looking for ways for UNIFIL to advance the objectives of 1559 implementation. Although French officials prefaced their January 11 remarks to us by expressing concern over perceived U.S. lack of cooperation on a UNSC press statement on the January 9 Blue Line clashes, we don't see the French offering a quid pro quo between the press statement and the UNIFIL renewal text. End summary and comment.

[1](#)2. (C) Poloff reviewed reftel talking points on U.S. views on UNIFIL renewal with MFA DAS-equivalent for UN/Political Affairs Jean-Pierre La Croix and MFA UN/Middle East desk officer Alice Guitton January 11, and with MFA DAS-equivalent for Egypt/Levant Affairs Christian Jouret January 10. (Note: As the MFA IO Directorate has the lead on this issue, La Croix provided the definitive GoF response, which he said was made in consultation with Presidential Technical Advisor on the Middle East/Americas Andre Parant. End note.) La Croix responded to our points by stressing shared U.S. and French objectives on Lebanon. As co-sponsors of 1559, we shared a desire to promote Lebanon's sovereignty, territorial integrity and the restoration of Lebanese authority throughout Lebanon, and the GoF, like the U.S., wanted to reinforce these concepts in the UNIFIL renewal resolution. Nevertheless, the GoF remained convinced that it would be counterproductive to include a preambular reference to UNSCR 1559 in the UNIFIL renewal, which, in the French view, would not advance 1559 implementation. On the contrary, the GoF concluded that a 1559 reference would "do exactly what the Syrian and Lebanese governments wanted," namely validate the Syrian effort to link its domination of Lebanon to lack of a comprehensive Middle East peace. Contrary to U.S. analysis, the GoF believed that Syria would welcome a 1559 reference in the UNIFIL renewal in order to reinforce its "chronological approach" to enforcement of UNSCR's -- i.e, implement 242, 425 et al, first, and then Syria can get around to implementing UNSCR 1559. La Croix summed up by stressing that France, in pursuing UNSCR 1559, had sought to establish a line of separation between Syrian domination of Lebanon and the peace process; in the French view, a mere preambular reference to 1559 in the UNIFIL renewal would break that line of separation and slow prospects for implementation.

[1](#)3. (C) Responding to our assessment of the common elements between UNSCR 1553 (on UNIFIL's most recent extension) and UNSCR 1559, La Croix stressed that support for Lebanon's "territorial integrity, sovereignty, and independence" were elements of UNSCR resolutions long predating 1559. The GoF believed that we could stress "ideas" or elements from UNSCR

1559 -- such as the need for the GoL to return authority to the South -- and toughen references in the UNIFIL renewal text to Lebanon's sovereignty and independence, without creating a specific linkage between UNIFIL and 1559. In the GoF view, repackaging UNIFIL as a tool of UNSCR 1559 implementation would undermine the confidence of the Lebanese and Syrian governments, which in turn could affect UNIFIL's continued ability to carry out its vital mission.

14. (C) La Croix was less negative, but still apprehensive on the U.S. proposal to ask DPKO to examine the UNIFIL force structure. On the one hand, La Croix said the GoF saw merit in asking DPKO to examine the efficacy of ongoing PKO's. At the same time, there was a special context to UNIFIL's current situation in the aftermath of the adoption of UNSCR 1559, and the GoF wanted to remain prudent. In the GoF view, if we wanted UNIFIL to have any role in helping advance implementation of UNSCR 1559, it needed to be more active, issue more reports, and look more closely at elements relevant to 1559 -- all conditions which would suggest the need to preserve UNIFIL, not reduce its size. The GoF believed UNIFIL could be a part of UNSCR 1559 implementation, but wanted to proceed discreetly and cautiously, without associating the Syrian presence in Lebanon with the peace process, and without weakening UNIFIL's ability to carry out its mission.

15. (C) Turning to French expectations of the UN role on UNSCR 1559 implementation, La Croix stressed the GoF's preoccupation with pressing for Syrian non-interference in Lebanon's upcoming legislative elections. La Croix described Terje Roed-Larsen, newly-appointed UN Special Representative for UNSCR 1559 implementation, as the U.S. and France's "ally" on this issue and said the GoF had hoped Larsen could visit the region at the earliest opportunity. Larsen had hoped to make such a visit earlier this month, but was told by the Syrians to delay the visit two weeks, pending a possible "positive development" on Lebanon. (Comment: La Croix evinced skepticism that such a positive gesture was forthcoming from the Syrian side. End comment.) The GoF wanted Larsen to pass a strong message to the Syrians on Lebanon's electoral law, and have Larsen and his subordinates visit the region frequently in the run-up to the April UNSYG report. The GoF had already specified to Larsen that it hoped the April report would follow the same format as its predecessor, namely list obligations on UNSCR 1559 implementation, one-by-one, with an assessment of whether each condition had been met. La Croix added that if, by April, neither the Syrian or Lebanese governments had taken UNSCR 1559 into account, there would be unspecified "consequences" for French bilateral relations with both governments. He added that the GoF was seeking to raise the European profile in pushing for UNSCR 1559 implementation and supporting Larsen's efforts; the GoF had successfully pressed for mention of 1559 in the most recent European Council declaration, and was considering asking the next EU General and External Affairs Council (GAERC) meeting to invite Larsen to attend and brief ministers on his efforts.

16. (C) Comment: La Croix prefaced his remarks to us by stressing the GoF's disappointment that, at the time of our meeting, the U.S. and Algeria were, in the GoF view, impeding agreement on a UNSC press statement condemning the January 9 Blue Line clashes that ended with the death of a French UN observer in southern Lebanon. While the apparent resolution of the press statement will improve atmospherics with the French in New York as we discuss UNIFIL renewal, in no way did La Croix suggest that France was willing to offer a quid pro quo or link the press statement with its position on UNIFIL renewal. To us the French opposition to including the preambular reference appears quite firm, although the French appear ready to engage in New York on other ways to toughen the renewal resolution. We also see little potential for the Elysee to overrule the MFA on this, as La Croix is an authoritative, well-connected interlocutor and we do not doubt his assertion that the Elysee is on board with the position he articulated. At any rate, we will meet with Elysee Middle East Advisor Parant on the evening of January 11 to press further on this issue and see if there is hope of bringing the GoF around on this. End comment.

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